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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: JO KPAO SCUL OEXC OIIP
SUBJECT: U.S. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS DELIVER MESSAGE TO RECEPTIVE BUT HESITANT AUDIENCE

¶1. SUMMARY: THE ECA FUNDED U.S. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS TOUR VISITED JORDAN OCTOBER 20-22 TO DELIVER THE MESSAGE TO JORDANIAN STUDENTS THAT THEY CONTINUE TO BE WELCOME IN U.S. UNIVERSITIES. THE PROGRAM INCLUDED DIALOGUE AND INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR HIGH-LEVEL EDUCATION CONTACTS, UNIVERSITY AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC, INCLUDING A BREAKFAST DISCUSSION WITH SENIOR UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS HOSTED BY AMBASSADOR GNEHM. ALL AUDIENCES, INCLUDING PROSPECTIVE JORDANIAN STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES, WERE GENERALLY RECEPTIVE AND EAGER TO HEAR THE MESSAGE, BUT DID NOT HIDE THEIR CONTINUED HESITANCY ABOUT THE PERCEIVED SITUATION, REGARDING TOLERANCE, COMFORT-LEVEL, AND NEW VISA, ENTRY, AND REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS, IN THE U.S. FOR ARAB AND MUSLIM STUDENTS. THE ADMINISTRATORS' PROGRAM ATTRACTED SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE, WITH MOST REPORTS FOCUSING ON THE ADMINISTRATORS' MESSAGE OF WELCOME AND ON PACIFYING VISA RELATED MISCONCEPTIONS. POST ARRANGED CONSULAR REPRESENTATION AT ALL PUBLIC FUNCTIONS AND FOUND THEIR PARTICIPATION TO BE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO ADDRESS NEVER-ENDING VISA-RELATED QUESTIONS. END SUMMARY.

¶2. PAS AND AMIDEAST TEAMED UP TO COORDINATE THE U.S. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS TOUR OCTOBER 20-22 IN JORDAN. THE THREE U.S. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS SELECTED FOR JORDAN, CHARLES GREENLEAF, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, RANDALL RICHARDSON, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, AND MARY GRAY, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY, WERE EFFECTIVE IN DELIVERING A CLEAR AND CONSISTENT MESSAGE OF WELCOME TO JORDANIAN STUDENTS, AND AUDIENCES SEEMED TO RECEIVE THE REPRESENTATIVES AS AUTHORITATIVE, GENUINE, AND SYMPATHETIC. PROGRAM EVENTS INCLUDED A BREAKFAST PANEL DISCUSSION HOSTED BY THE AMBASSADOR WITH UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS, ADMINISTRATORS AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM SPONSORS, A PRESS ROUNDTABLE WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL MAJOR LOCAL PRINT AND RADIO MEDIA, A PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION THAT DREW A CROWD OF AROUND 300 PEOPLE, AND MEETINGS AND INFORMATION SESSIONS AT A LOCAL UNIVERSITY AND A HIGH SCHOOL.

¶3. TWO MAIN CONCERNS BECAME CLEAR FROM ALL SESSIONS, WITH ONE OR THE OTHER WEIGHING MORE HEAVILY DEPENDING ON THE SPECIFIC AUDIENCE. THE FIRST ISSUE CONCERNED THE TREATMENT OF ARAB AND MUSLIM STUDENTS IN THE U.S., BOTH SOCIALLY WITHIN UNIVERSITY AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND ADMINISTRATIVELY BY GOVERNMENT OR UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS. THE SECOND ISSUE CENTERED ON NEW VISA, ENTRY AND REGISTRATION PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS. WHILE ALL GROUPS EXPRESSED AT LEAST SOME AMOUNT OF APPREHENSION REGARDING BOTH ISSUES, GENERALLY ATTENDEES WITH LITTLE PREVIOUS EXPOSURE TO THE U.S. EXPRESSED MORE ANXIETY OVER TREATMENT CONCERNS, WHILE THOSE WITH EXTENSIVE PERSONAL OR FAMILY EXPERIENCE IN THE U.S. CITED NEW PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS AS THEIR LARGEST WORRY. AT AN INFORMATION SESSION HELD FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC, THE ADMINISTRATORS AND PANEL MEMBERS RESPONDED TO MANY QUESTIONS ALONG THE LINE OF "WILL I BE REJECTED ADMISSION OR EVALUATED DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE I AM ARAB?" COMPARATIVELY, AT A PANEL DISCUSSION HELD FOR APPROXIMATELY 50 STUDENTS AND PARENTS AT THE PRESTIGIOUS AMMAN BACCALAUREATE SCHOOL, A HIGH SCHOOL THAT REGULARLY SENDS ITS STUDENTS TO U.S. UNIVERSITIES SUCH AS HARVARD AND BROWN, THE MAJORITY OF QUESTIONS WERE POSED BY PARENTS AND DIRECTED AT THE EMBASSY'S CONSULAR OFFICER. THIS AUDIENCE, WHILE MAINTAINING A VERY FAVORABLE VIEW OF U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION AND A PREFERENCE FOR SENDING THEIR CHILDREN TO THE U.S. TO STUDY, MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY WOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER OTHER OPTIONS IF THEY FELT THAT THEIR CHILDREN WOULD FACE DIFFICULT LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES RELATED TO THEIR ENTRY AND RESIDENCE IN THE U.S.

¶4. THE ADMINISTRATORS' TOUR RECEIVED EXTENSIVE LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE, WITH THE MAJORITY OF HEADLINES REFLECTING THE MESSAGES OF WELCOME AND/OR THE CONTINUED ISSUANCE OF STUDENT VISAS. AL-RA'I ARABIC DAILY CARRIED TWO INSIDE-PAGE REPORTS, ONE WITH THE HEADLINE: "U.S. AMBASSADOR: WE WELCOME JORDANIAN AND ARAB STUDENTS IN OUR UNIVERSITIES," AND THE SECOND HEADLINE: "AMERICAN ACADEMICS: NUMBER OF JORDANIAN STUDENTS IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES DID NOT GO DOWN AFTER SEPTEMBER 11." IN ADDITION, AL-DUSTOUR ARABIC DAILY FILED AN ARTICLE WITH POSITIVE REMARKS BY THE ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE SITUATION OF ARAB STUDENTS IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES, AND THE JORDAN TIMES ENGLISH DAILY CARRIED A REPORT FOCUSING ON ATTEMPTS TO "ALLAY CONCERNS OVER THE

TREATMENT OF ARAB STUDENTS IN THE U.S. AND DISPEL ANY VISA DELAY RUMORS." WHILE NO REPORTS WERE ENTIRELY NEGATIVE, AN ARTICLE FILED BY THE LOCAL AP REPORTER INCLUDED THE HEADLINE: "U.S. UNIVERSITY ENVOYS REASSURE ARAB STUDENTS THEY ARE WELCOME, BUT JORDANIANS REMAIN SUSPICIOUS." THIS SAME REPORT QUOTED FROM INTERVIEWS WITH JORDANIAN STUDENTS ATTENDING THE PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION, INCLUDING ONE 18-YEAR OLD WOMAN WHO STATED, "DESPITE THE ASSURANCES WE'RE HEARING, I'M STILL AFRAID BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE HARASSMENT I MAY FACE AS AN ARAB. MY PARENTS ARE OPPOSED TO SENDING ME TO THE UNITED STATES AND PREFER THAT I GO TO ENGLAND."

¶5. COMMENT: THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS' EXPLICIT WELCOME TO ARAB AND MUSLIM STUDENTS IS, FINALLY, ONE MESSAGE THAT JORDANIANS WANT TO HEAR. THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE PROGRAM SESSIONS REFLECTED A SENSE THAT JORDANIANS TRULY WANT TO BELIEVE THAT THEY OR THEIR CHILDREN ARE WELCOME AND SAFE IN U.S. UNIVERSITIES, DESPITE THEIR REMAINING HESITATION. THE TWO TYPES OF AUDIENCES ENCOUNTERED DURING THIS TOUR POINTS TO TWO NEEDED STRATEGIES: FIRST, SINCE IT IS A MESSAGE THAT THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE ALREADY DESIRE TO BE TRUE, IT IS HELPFUL TO REPEATEDLY STATE IN A VARIETY OF WAYS THE SIMPLE MESSAGE THAT ARAB AND MUSLIMS ARE WELCOME AND DESIRED AT U.S. UNIVERSITIES. IN ADDITION, FOR OUR MORE EXPOSED AUDIENCE, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO PROVIDE INCREASED ACCESS TO CLEAR, DEFINITIVE INFORMATION ON VISA, ENTRY, AND REGISTRATION PROCEDURES.

GNEHM